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AN ADDRESS

ON

# RECHABITISM,

DELIVERED AT THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF  
THE INDEPENDENT ORDER OF

## RECHABITES,

IN THE HALL OF THE

### SPRING OF CANADA TENT,

On the 18th July, 1845,

BY THE REV. W. T. LEACH, A. M.

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*Published by Request of the Members of the Order.*

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PRINTED BY BROTHER J. C. BECKET, ST. PAUL STREET

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## RECHABITISM.

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The Independent Order of Rechabites is one of those benevolent institutions which, in certain states of society, are found to be usually originated for the remedy of existing evils, and the advancement of the common good in some particular way, or ways, that seem justifiable and possible. It professes to be an instrument for the accomplishment of an end, which every one must acknowledge to be beneficial in the highest degree, serving to promote the decency, the security, and good order of society, and contributing largely to the amount of private happiness and prosperity. It has a claim, therefore, upon public attention and respect. It deserves to be considered how far it may or may not be a suitable and efficacious instrument for the accomplishment of the good it proposes to bring about. Even in the absence of all experience of its practical working and effects, it deserves to be examined. Its professedly benevolent object, and its confident hopes of successful results, even though these results shall be found from experience to be far from universal, or even but partial, render it worthy of being scrutinized by the philanthropist, especially by those who have laboured, and still exert themselves with the same views in a different course. Indeed it would be strange, if, amid the enormous and widely prevalent evils of intemperance, those who rejoice in the well-being, and deplore the miseries of their fellow-creatures, should reject, without full and serious consideration, what promises to be a probable means of accomplishing great good. It would be strange, since a tenderness for human misery and distress is often found sufficient to call forth the largest sacrifices in support of the shallowest and most ephemeral expedients for the removal or reduction of these sufferings.

It may be supposed to be acknowledged, that in modern times nothing has tended more than intemperance to corrupt the public



morals; and if one regards its destructive effects, all other diseases and calamities have been comparatively hurtless. It partakes, indeed, of the character of a disease, all the more malignant, because it often prostrates the power of volition, and creates an unnatural appetite to the extinction of life—a proneness to the violation of those laws which God has enacted for its preservation. Of course it is voluntary, and therefore vicious—a moral pestilence generated in society, and penetrating every part of it. Its cause is known; it walks not in darkness, like the subtle agents of numerous diseases that infect in secret—it is not the consequence of any organic defect, nor does it arise from any necessity which is imposed by the physical condition of our being, and is, therefore, a voluntary and criminal evil. Nevertheless the fashion of society operates like a necessary cause for its production. The law of nature and the general custom are inverted. The temptation is not regarded as a temptation, but as the supply of an allowable indulgence. The vice is scarcely regarded as a vice, but as a necessity; and the over proneness to self-indulgence, with all its deplorable train of sickness, and miseries, and degradation, and death, is not understood as a disease reveling in the heart and in the brain, and infecting large masses of the population, but almost tacitly surrendered to its course, and interpreted as the imprudence and natural infirmity of the individual members enslaved by its influence. Temperance Societies, and the institution of the Independent Order of Rechabites in particular, are indications of a cure—symptoms of a determination on the part of nature to assert the authority of her laws. As in the human constitution there is a *vis medicatrix*, as the physicians term it—a tendency in the system, when the general action of its powers remains unsubdued, to throw off the causes of particular diseases, and spring back into a salutary state; so in the social body, when a law of nature has been long perverted, and the forms and opinions of society have long ministered to its perversion, after a long time come the symptoms of a cure—a healthy reaction in favour of the established and unquenchable laws that govern the stream of life. Viewed in this light, the institution of the Rechabites is indicative of the agency of the *vis medicatrix*—a favourable appearance, which evinces the commencement and progress of a restorative process.

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Whatever be the description of means, and the designations of the various Societies that hold out the prospect of this remedial change, they are phenomena in the existing state of society that cannot but be profoundly interesting. The shallow and unthinking only will be disposed to confound them with the quack expedients often so confidently advanced for the regeneration of society—expedients that usually run in the teeth of nature, and though prompted by benevolent motives not unfrequently subversive of those divine laws, without which mankind must disband and live like the beasts. These however are means that remand suffering humanity to nature, and may calculate upon her concurrence and support. It is their object to make her voice be heard, and make her voice be heard. Nor is the interest of these means destroyed, while it is admitted that they are short of an absolute victory over the evil they assail, in any circumstance which attaches to all human institutions. In question be materially reduced—if the manners and morals of society be so modified as to secure the advancement of the remedial process, to send it on its way rejoicing, diffusing health, and strength, and happiness in its path, the means by which this happy progress is maintained, if justifiable in principle and innocently administered, deserve the praise and support of all that have a just title to the name of man.

Such is the light in which Temperance Societies in general, but emphatically the Independent Order of Rechabites, ought to be contemplated. They are benevolent in their aim, and coincide in their object with the law of God, both as exhibited in nature, and declared by revelation. The object, then, is good; let us look to the nature of the means, and to the detail of regulations by which it is sought to work it out. The Independent Order of Rechabites is called a secret society, and is so called because the members of it have adopted measures for their own good order, which are not publicly made known. The secrecy consists in this; it does not consist in the measures which they use for the advocacy and advancement of the cause they have undertaken to promote. The nature of the case renders it necessary that their measures to this end be open and public, inasmuch as their rational arguments, their demonstrations of its utility, and happiness, and duty, toge-



ther with just representations of the intolerable and acknowledged evils of intemperance, are the only weapons by which they can hope for a successful issue to their moral contest. Their object is understood, their means of accomplishing it are known, and nothing remains unknown that infringes upon the right of others, or disturbs the order of society—nothing that falls under the animadversion of the magistrate, or can be cause of complaint to any member of the community. What rational objection, then, can any one have to offer as to the matter of secrecy—no rational objection; none but the infinitely absurd objection that might be offered to any private council, or private party or club, or even a private family. There are material advantages, however, as to order and efficiency, that arise from the adoption of private regulations. The members of the Order are thereby united more closely—the bond of duty is made clearer—the bond of interest is made stronger, and a foundation is laid for a mutual respect and regard among a number of persons, who, having a great selected end in view, live according to the convictions they express, and unite with the purest benevolence of purpose in recommending to others a rule of life which they believe to be good. As to the matter of temperance, the difference between the Rechabites and other Temperance Societies seems to consist in this, that the former have introduced into their system principles of government and order that have a far more powerful influence both upon individual members and the general operations of the body, than other Temperance Societies have. They have the advantage, therefore, of having their operations regulated by some additional oversight and authority. They may therefore be expected to proceed more deliberately and systematically. This is true, that obedience to the regulations prescribed is voluntary. The sense of duty and love of order, as well as a degree even of temporal interest, are appealed to, in order to secure acquiescence in them. All these may no doubt fail, but under the circumstances there is no element omitted which can be brought to bear upon the good government of the body, nor could anything additional be desired, unless it be the deepening of a persuasion that ought to be constantly present in every association of the kind—the persuasion that a ready and unhesitating obedience to the rules of the Order, and the exclusion of all that

is extraneous to them, constitute the pillar of strength upon which the association rests. The thirst of legislating is always a proof of weakness—it is a sure sign of the dissolution of every association in which it prevails. It roots up all confidence, and eventually destroys all consistence and order. It is to be ascribed to this, as by far the chief cause, that many excellent institutions, after a short lived existence, vanish. In order to secure confidence and efficiency, there can be nothing more requisite than uniformity of operation, and the assurance of stability; but where one thing is done to-day, and another thing to-morrow, and private regulations made to supersede the general rules, this is an infallible sign of a dissolving and expiring body. There is, however, a provision in the institution of the Rechabites against this source of weakness; and so important is this part of its interior policy, that it can never be too constantly referred to, nor too solemnly enforced.

There is another point to which it seems proper to advert. The objection is not unfrequently made that Rechabite and other Temperance Societies are a sort of unwarrantable usurpation of the province of Christianity, as if they impudently pretended to be a substitute for it, and that their efforts in some manner may be unfavourable to it. If this objection were valid, it would, indeed, be a serious one; but it is hardly possible to suppose it could ever be seriously offered. The pointing the finger to those who compose the Independent Order of Rechabites, is the refutation of the objection. It needs no other refutation, because there stands the body of evidence sufficient to confound all the supposals and conjectures that can be made, to shew that the consequences have been constantly found to be the reverse of those apprehended. If every Rechabite were brought to the bar and tried one after another, and if upon trial it were clearly ascertained that he was a more regular member of the Church, or a more devoted attendant upon religious services, the objection would be made appear to be a very lame one; and such exactly is it found to be in point of fact—an objection where all existing evidence contradicts the truth of it, and proves it to be nonsense. The objection, then, must come with a bad grace from those who seek to build up the Church of Christ, when they object to a means of accomplishing the very

object they desire, unless they can shew that the means employed is erroneous in principle, and unjustifiable. It is very commonly said, if on the principles of the gospel temperance cannot be maintained and promoted in human society, nothing else will avail to do it. This is another assertion in the face of experience. The fact is, that in a great many cases where the precepts and doctrines of the truth in Christ do not reach home to the individual, and subject him to their authority, there are other means that do; where they cannot prevent men from committing acts of violence or theft, may not the laws of the land do so, the disgrace of detection, and the fear of punishment? In the matter of temperance, as in all things else, some motives may prevail, where others prove ineffectual; and with regard to the Order of Rechabites in particular, where the highest Christian motives combine with the principle of honour—with benevolence, and prudence, and self-preservation—with the restraints and obligations peculiarly fitted to govern and impress the members of the Order, it is impossible but that its interior regulations must exert an influence far beyond that of any other system, whose discipline has not a special reference to the object in question; and so, in fact, are they found to do. The circumstance of Christians of all denominations—of persons even who make no religious profession—being admitted into the Order, and to a participation of its advantages, precludes the possibility of its assuming a religious authority, or of its being justly regarded in that light.

One of the leading objects of the Rechabites, is to promote the cause of temperance, and with this view there is exacted from every member a total abstinence from all that can intoxicate, with but two specific cases of exception—viz., when used at the communion, and when prescribed by a physician. This practical recommendation of the rule is of great value. It demonstrates how easily and safely the use of intoxicating liquors can be dispensed with. It proves them to be necessary for neither health of body, nor soundness of mind, and holds out living examples of the beneficial effects of habitual sobriety and self-command; so that the very life of a Rechabite exerts a valuable practical influence. In addition to this, it is the duty of the Order to accumulate and convey information on the subject of tempe-

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rance, and to correct erroneous views respecting the use and abuse of intoxicating liquors. It is their aim, by demonstrating the deplorable effects and the prevalence of intemperance, to interest and unite the temperate portion of society in a general endeavour to remove or alleviate the enormous evil. They are called upon, too, to exercise in their private capacity compassion for the wretchedness of the slaves of this vice, and by all suitable means to exert their active beneficence to reclaim them ; and this is a work of benevolence, which, when gone about with prudence and characteristic temper and kindliness, is seldom found to fail in multiplying instances of a happy recovery to health and prosperity, purity of manners, and honourable exertion in all the duties of life.

There are, of course, various modes of advocating the temperance cause, and instances have not been rare in which it has been rather prejudiced than advanced by individual eccentricity. Perhaps no cause so good has ever suffered so much in this respect. Erroneous statements have often been made, and false premises often assumed, and sometimes unwarrantable onslaughts have been made upon unbelievers and upon occupations demanded in the present state of society and sanctioned by the laws of every country in the world. The effect of this has often been to excite opposition, and accordingly to bring about the reverse of what was intended. The Rechabites have this advantage, from their interior system of regulations, that they have the oversight of this, and may, if they please, wisely confine the advocacy of the cause of temperance to a course perfectly unexceptionable and justifiable.

Another leading object of the Rechabites, is the mutual support of its members in the case of sickness. There are many causes that render this especially beneficial in a new country. In older countries, where the individual grows up within a circle of friends and relations, the sympathy and mutual dependence of ancient friendship and neighbourhood are brought into immediate and instantaneous play, and much assistance may be expected from " the unfettered operation of Christian precepts, and of the kindlier feelings of nature upon the heart and conduct of others." Here however, men stand more alone in society—they are remote from

the source whence the strongest and purest streams of charity usually flow. No systematic provision is made by the laws of the land for their relief, and the more delicate and deserving class of sufferers must, consequently, undergo a ten-fold more painful probation here than they would at home, since they will require for the most part to appeal to those upon whose connection with them they can ground no plea, and upon whose affections they have no particular claim. The regulations of the Rechabites fill up this gap, and give every member an interest in the happiness of his brother. If this single object were fully and fairly carried out—if it were systematically attended to, and provided for by the accumulation of a fund, that could afford an effectual support in time of need, the fulfilment of this object alone would suffice to render the institution worthy of all praise, and make it one of the most valuable that could be established in human society. It is obvious, however, that without any fund in reserve, whence the usual administration may be made to the necessity of a member requiring assistance, there can be little probability of any wise use of this part of the system of the Rechabites, when an unexpected draught must be made, upon the spur of the moment, on those of the members who may happen to be present. Nothing can justify, in my opinion, any other application of the funds, while this part of the machinery is out of repair; and as the rules of the Order make no mention of any extraneous charities, it is impossible to see upon what principle they can be introduced to the notice of the tent. There is a beautiful coincidence between this part of the system, and the principles of Christianity, serving to teach us to bear one another's burdens—to make light the weight of one another's chains, and amid the common calamities of life, from which none can flatter himself with having a security, to have a reserved relief and provision against misfortune;—more than that, to have even the assurance that the event of his death shall bring along with it the means of a decent burial in the dust of the grave. It is a natural sentiment that clings to the heart through all the stages of life, that one's bones ought to find a tranquil and undisturbed resting-place, and to the survivors it may serve to send a ray of joy in the dark hour of their bereavement—to know that the dead have been so far honoured with the respect which the dead

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can receive—that the spot which receives what is mortal may be called her own by the widow and the orphan—be decked with flowers of their own planting, and hallowed with their tears.

It is quite consistent with the general spirit and professed principles of the Rechabites, to prevent, if possible, that quarrelsome and litigious disposition, which so often leads people, on the plea of petty provocations and trifling advantages, to fly to the courts of justice for relief. It is well known that recourse is often had to such a quarter from mere feelings of anger, and for the gratification of revenge. A Rechabite would shew himself but little faithful to his brother, and serve his cause erringly and ill, if these, the lowest and most malignant passions of nature, could still carry him captive; and it could avail him little to have vanquished one passion, if he carried in his breast others no less hateful. The laws of the Order render it obligatory on every Rechabite to permit nothing but the plainest perfidiousness and faithlessness to banish a brother from his heart, always to afford him an opportunity of explanation, and in the absence of all evidence, to put upon his conduct the most favourable construction. "He that is angry with his brother without a cause," is a solemn warning from a high authority. If it is a shame that it can be said, there goes a Rechabite drunk—if it is a shame that it can be said, there lies a Rechabite sick and in want—if it is a shame that it can be said, there goes a Rechabite dishonoured and solitary to the silent home of the forgotten, it is no less discreditable to see two Rechabites, in the spirit of resentment and strife, rush recklessly into the dangers of the law courts. This ought to be regarded as only a last resort, when the prescribed regulations of the Order have been wisely complied with, and in this case it may be assumed that the pernicious consequences of the threatened strife will generally be prevented. If I interpret aright the spirit of the laws that are for the government of the Order, every Rechabite is to a certain extent his brother's keeper, bound to protect his interest, bound to defend his reputation, bound to support him in his sickness, and bound to honour him in his death, and all alike bound to work out the great objects that lie as the substratum of the Order—temperance and fortitude, benevolence and perfect faithfulness to their trust. Let us remember, however, that no



long term of experience enables us to pronounce with confidence upon its final success. It has never yet received that measure of public approbation and regard, which an institution so highly moral seems to me to deserve, and its doing so must depend entirely upon the prudence and wisdom of those into whose hands has been committed the direction of its movements. There is nothing, indeed, that may be more confidently asserted than this, that nothing will prove a greater obstruction to its prosperity, and more endanger its existence, than the frequent repeal of existing regulations, and the enacting of new ones. Let this course be adopted from time to time, and the whole goes to nothing, and vanishes away like the smoke of a sacrifice. The history of every similar institution corroborates this view, and shews us the propriety of obstinately rejecting every innovation, till it has been sanctioned by competent authority, and cautiously received upon a full consideration of evidence. I do not say that no improvements may be suggested in the machinery—I believe it to be susceptible of improvement; but it is far better in such cases to contend with an existing evil, than to introduce another that is even equal, inasmuch as the very change indicates a spirit that will always prove destructive. Let me express a hope that these observations will be received with the spirit in which they are made, with an earnest desire for the good of mankind and the prosperity of this Order, and with a feeling of perfect friendship and respect for every brother of the Tent in which I now stand.

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